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RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 2225
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1032
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 0698
RUEHDO/AMEMBASSY DOHA 0616
RUEHPG/AMEMBASSY PRAGUE 0253
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NOUAKCHOTT 000368

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SUBJECT: NOUADHIBOU CENI: FINGERS CROSSED FOR CONSENSUS BUT
MOVING FORWARD

REF: NOUAKCHOTT 357

Classified By: Ambassador Mark Boulware for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: In a visit to Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) headquarters in Nouadhibou, EmbOffs saw comparable conditions to those found in the Trarza CENI (Ref A). Like their Trarza colleagues, Nouadhibou CENI representatives wished there would be a consensus but keep preparing for the June 6 election. They did not flag any major concerns or lack of resources but highlighted the current electoral campaign is much less dynamic than the 2007 campaign. End summary.

12. (C) In an extremely cordial meeting, Nouadhibou CENI representatives told PolOff and PolAsst May 31 that they would prefer the political crisis is solved before the elections take place, but continue preparing for the June 6 deadline. Ahmed Ould Khoubah, regional commission president and 2007 CENI member, was accompanied by CENI veterans Abderrahmane Kone and Mohamed Ould M'Boirick. Anne Bintou Cire Ly, a new hire in charge of the departmental commission, was also present. According to Khoubah, 90% of those working in the Nouadhibou elections worked in the 2007 elections and received National Democratic Institute (NDI) training. CENI is also providing training to new hires. Comment: On a positive note, it seems that the 2007 election created a new class of electoral technicians in Mauritania who are now using their knowledge -- sometimes acquired through training provided by Western organizations -- to plan the June 6 election and train others. End comment.

13. (C) Khoubah stated there are 115,000 voters and 66 polling stations in Nouadhibou. Reading from a detailed report, he informed EmbOffs that electoral lists have been double checked for irregularities and posted, electoral material has been received and electoral cards are currently being distributed. Comment: The administration is distributing new cards following updates to the electoral list resulting from the recent electoral census. Voters can pick up their electoral cards at designated locations during the campaign period. There have been reports of very low electoral card withdrawal rates, which the opposition considers an indication of low participation. End comment. In response to PolOff's question about whether the card

withdrawal rate could be a sign of the population's boycott of the election, Khoubah explained that voters do not need their electoral cards to vote. Electoral cards can be picked up the day of the election and voters only need an identification card to verify their name against those on the list. Comment: In a meeting with the RFD, they claimed that traditionally, Mauritians do pick up their cards early and the fact they have not done so this time means they are not interested. End comment. Khoubah agreed to show EmbOffs a sample copy of the ballot.

¶4. (C) "There are no big problems so far," stated Khoubah. He said CENI offices are equipped with computers and printers and CENI members have vehicles that allow them to move around their areas to monitor the campaign. Nevertheless, he stressed far off areas where there is no cell phone reception lack means of communications, but the administration promised to provide them satellite phones the day before the election.

M'Boirick highlighted the limits of transparency in CENI's work by reminding EmbOffs that the electoral census had been conducted without CENI supervision and that they could not vouch for its quality. Ly also stressed the CENI, like everybody else, was aware of food distributions by presidential candidates.

¶5. (C) Khoubah and the others intimated that the current campaign is very different from the 2007 one. They said Mauritians are eager for a solution to the crisis but are not enthusiastic about the elections. The main difference between now and 2007, they agreed, is that there was no

NOUAKCHOTT 00000368 002 OF 002

crisis in 2007. They said the participation rate in 2007 was 74% and declined to predict the participation rate in this election. "We have no idea how the boycott will look like," they stated, "but suspect people will just stay home as opposed to voting blank." They ended the meeting by sharing with EmbOffs descriptions of sketches by a Mauritanian comedian who makes fun of politicians and uses humor to talk about taboo topics.

¶6. (C) Comment: In Nouadhibou as in the Trarza, CENI is marching steadily towards the June 6 election. CENI representatives seemed politically neutral and focused on their technical work but hinted they are not naive about the true nature of these elections. End comment.
BOULWARE